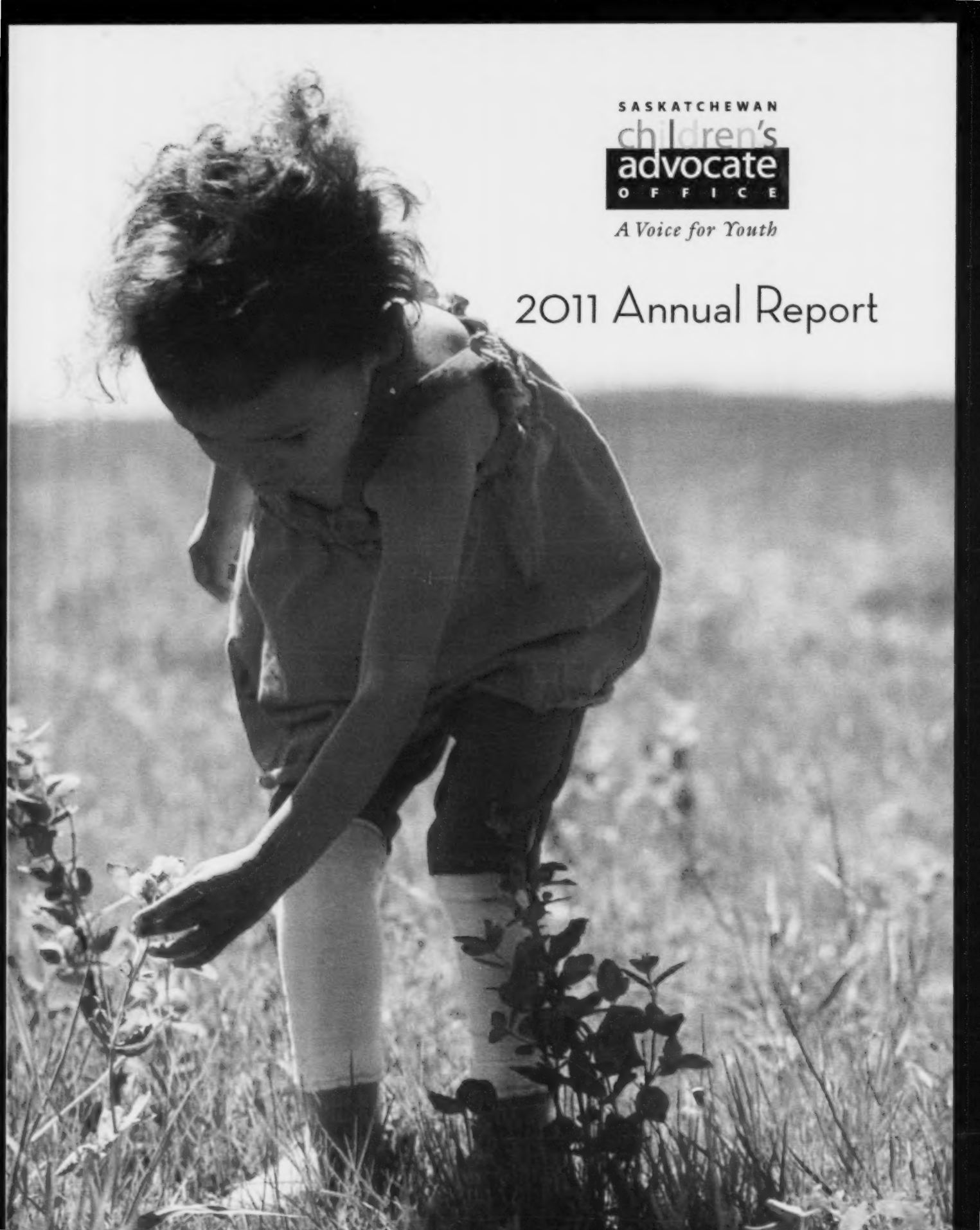

SASKATCHEWAN
children's
advocate
OFFICE

A Voice for Youth

2011 Annual Report

SASKATCHEWAN
children's advocate
OFFICE
A Voice for Youth

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SASKATCHEWAN

Letter of Transmittal

April 26, 2012

The Honourable Dan D'Autremont
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly
Legislative Building
Regina SK S4S 0B3

Dear Mr. Speaker:

In accordance with *The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Act*, it is my privilege to submit to you, and to the members of the Legislative Assembly, my second *Annual Report* as Saskatchewan Children's Advocate.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Pringle

Bob Pringle
Children's Advocate
Province of Saskatchewan

Our vision is that the rights, interests and well-being of children and youth are respected and valued in our communities and in government legislation, policy, programs and practice.

Mandate

The Children's Advocate is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan and acts pursuant to *The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Act*. The Children's Advocate has the legislated responsibilities, among other things, to:

- Become involved in public education respecting the interests and well-being of children;
- Receive, review and investigate any matter concerning a child, group of children or services to a child or group of children by any government ministry or agency; and
- Try to resolve those matters, where appropriate, through non-adversarial approaches, such as negotiation, conciliation and mediation, and/or make recommendations on such matters.

The Children's Advocate may also conduct research or advise any minister responsible on any matter relating to the interests and well-being of children.

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The Children's Advocate Office is headquartered in Saskatoon; however, our Office's services and programs are delivered throughout the province of Saskatchewan.

Message from the Advocate

Dear Friends,

It has been a truly remarkable first year as Children's Advocate.

I am humbled by the support shown to our Office by children, youth and their families, Members of the Legislative Assembly, First Nations and Métis leaders, ministry and agency managers and staff at all levels, and research and community partners. Appreciation must also be extended to my fellow independent officers in our province and advocates across the country for their invaluable and gracious guidance.

The Children's Advocate Office is staffed by an exceptional group of employees who persistently pursue the rights, well-being and interests of children and youth. Their work is remarkable, as is their resilience in dealing with difficult subject matter and cases. Rarely profiled in public, our confidential one-on-one work with children and youth is the foundation of our mandate. I thank our staff for their continuing support and service to the citizens of Saskatchewan.

The year 2011 was one of renewal for our Office. We built on the 15 years of achievements by my predecessors and worked to expand capacity to meet our broad mandate. We began a strategic planning process by affirming our vision, mandate and the guiding principles for our work. The latter expanded to include the *Touchstones of Hope* as a companion to the *Children and Youth First Principles*.

We reached out to former clients, and government, Aboriginal and community stakeholders to ask what our Office is doing right and how we could improve on our services for children and youth. We established new processes and prioritized professional development to refresh and bring new skills and experiences to our team.

I have a long-term vision for children and youth in Saskatchewan, and what I would like to achieve during my time as Children's Advocate.

It is my hope that within the coming years, the Government of Saskatchewan—with the assistance of our Office, First Nations and Métis leaders, and communities—builds a successful and sustainable *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda*, and that all children and youth are valued and respected members of our society. In doing so, we will have:

- developed a sustainable poverty reduction strategy to address social and economic drivers of the child welfare and criminal justice systems;
- transformed the child welfare system to better respond to the needs of families prior to points of crisis, and keep all children and youth in safe and supported homes; and,
- improved services and outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth and their families, with substantial supports, interventions and opportunities to succeed and counter the inter-generational trauma experienced by First Nations and Métis families and communities.

Saskatchewan Children's Advocate, Bob Pringle, is an independent statutory officer of the Legislative Assembly.

To help achieve this vision, my priorities as Children's Advocate are to:

- Advocate for social and public policy change that benefits all children and youth.
- Promote high quality government and community-based programs and services for children and youth.
- Strengthen collaboration and partnerships to achieve better outcomes for children and youth.
- Ensure the Children's Advocate Office delivers excellent, effective and efficient services for children and youth.

"Working openly and together, I believe that Saskatchewan can become an innovator and leader on child and youth matters."

We can overcome the challenges identified in the province's 2010 Child Welfare Review; change systems and services to better meet the needs of children, youth and their families; and, respect the rights of young people as valued members of our society.

It is an exciting time in our province and in our Office. New partnerships, directions and solutions are created everyday to the benefit of children, youth and their families. In this report, we recognize many of these positive developments, while also highlighting additional opportunities and issues requiring action. There is still much work to be done, but as your Children's Advocate I am proud to be a part of this change.

Bob Pringle

Children's Advocate Office Guiding Principles

Children and Youth First Principles

That all children and youth in Saskatchewan are entitled to:

1. Those rights defined by the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
2. Participate and be heard before any decision affecting them is made.
3. Have their 'best interests' given paramount consideration in any action or decision involving them.
4. An equal standard of care, protection and services.
5. The highest standard of health and education possible in order to reach their fullest potential.
6. Safety and protection from all forms of physical, emotional and sexual harm, while in the care of parents, governments, legal guardians or any person.
7. Be treated as the primary client, and at the centre, of all child serving systems.
8. Have consideration given to the importance of their unique life history and spiritual traditions and practices, in accordance with their stated views and preferences.

Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families

Relating
Working respectfully together to design, implement, and monitor the new child welfare system.

Restoring
Doing what we can to redress the harm and making changes to ensure it does not happen again.

Truth Telling
Telling the story of child welfare as it has affected Indigenous children, youth and families.

Acknowledging
Learning from the past, seeing one another with new understanding, and recognizing the need to move forward to a new path.

Issues and Opportunities

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Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda

In December 2010, the Saskatchewan Child Welfare Review Panel made 12 recommendations to the Government of Saskatchewan in its final report, *For the Good of Our Children and Youth*.

Among the provincial government's responses to the Panel's report was the formation of a Cabinet Committee on Children and Youth. The Cabinet Committee includes the seven Ministers of: Social Services; First Nations and Métis Relations; Health; Education; Advanced Education and Employment; Justice and Attorney General; and Corrections, Public Safety and Policing. It is co-chaired by the Ministers of Social Services and First Nations and Métis Relations.

The Cabinet Committee's first initiative was the development and implementation of a *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda*, which was a specific recommendation made by the Child Welfare Review Panel. The establishment of an Agenda was a significant announcement that signalled the provincial government's intention to create a new, high-level direction and focus on young people.

The Children's Advocate Office and our clients have a vested interest in the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda*. Clearly, we have a role to monitor the progress of this significant initiative. External stakeholders expect us to hold government accountable as it works towards sustainable change for children, youth and their families.

"We hope that a process can be established in Saskatchewan that is strong enough, effective enough, and stays in place long enough to fully address the challenges we face."

Child Welfare Review Panel
For the Good of Our Children and Youth

We believe that the early successes of the past year will provide an incentive to maintain and grow the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda* in the future. We also know that change of the magnitude envisioned in the Child Welfare Review recommendations will take time and require the effort of all of us—government, communities and individuals—to achieve.

The Agenda's Goals

The Children's Advocate Office supports the goals of the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda*:

- **Children** get a good start in life
- **Youth** are prepared for their futures
- **Families** are supported
- **Communities** are supportive

We believe that these four goals present an opportunity to focus on the unique program and service needs of particular groups of people, while working towards better overall outcomes for children, youth and their families.

Issue Example

Mental health, addictions and their related social and economic drivers are complex issues that may require a variety of programs for children, youth and/or their parents from government and community service providers.

For example, an infant born to an alcohol dependent parent may require screening, diagnosis and treatment from health services for potential cognitive and physical disabilities including Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Education supports may be required as they grow.

At the same time, their parents may require complementary diagnosis and treatment, and economic, employment, housing and parenting supports to meet the needs of the child. Without these supports, the family may break down and the child may be brought into the care of Social Services. We know that this outcome has significant costs for the child, parents and our society.

If the child is not fortunate enough to receive early diagnosis and interventions, or the parents are not supported to provide a safe and stable family for the child, as teens they may be at higher risk to drop out of school and/or become involved in the young offender system.

Should the young person enter the criminal justice system, this is another point of potential diagnosis and intervention for mental health and addictions issues. However, we also need to ensure that any treatment received in custody is supported when the youth returns to their family and community.

Using this example of the complex nature of mental health and addictions issues, we can see how the four goals of the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda* are critical to address individually, and how they build on each other to achieve better outcomes for the child, youth and family.

To date, the Agenda has included increased funding for the prevention of FASD. However, many other existing government and community mental health and addiction services and programs could be better integrated into the Agenda. This would provide the Cabinet Committee a broader understanding of the current continuum of services available to children, youth and their families, as well as what further innovations and investments are required to holistically address mental health and addictions issues.

Therefore, the Children's Advocate has encouraged the Cabinet Committee to use the four goals of the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda* to focus their work to:

- develop and implement appropriate cross-government strategies;
- build and engage government and community support; and,
- measure change in programs and in outcomes for children, youth and their families.

The Agenda's Strategies

To date, the Government of Saskatchewan has not widely profiled the Agenda's goals. Rather, four narrower cross-government strategies have been promoted under the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda*. They are:

1. Child Welfare Transformation
2. Autism and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (ASD/FASD)
3. First Nations and Métis Education and Employment
4. Building Partnerships to Reduce Crime and Violence

These strategies included initial funding of $34 million, which was increased to $40 million in the 2012-13 provincial budget. These are significant investments that have already resulted in new and improved services and supports for children, youth and their families. However, we have urged the Cabinet Committee to broaden the issues, programs and services they bring together under the Agenda to further breakdown ministry and agency silos and fully realize the potential of this collaborative structure.

Further, there is a compelling need to focus on the Agenda's fourth goal–that communities are supportive–as it is essential to the success of the first three. The *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda* cannot be just a government initiative. A robust, sustainable system of community-based committees, structures and solutions need to be supported by and connected to provincial government strategies.

Child Welfare Transformation

The Government of Saskatchewan has demonstrated a commitment to implement the recommendations of the Child Welfare Review Panel through the first-year actions of the Child Welfare Transformation. The Ministry of Social Services leads this strategy and has adopted three themes as a guide for this reform and renewal.

Working Differently

The signing of letters of understanding between the Government of Saskatchewan and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and Métis Nation of Saskatchewan in August 2011 is foundational to change in child welfare. Expanded agreements between the Ministry of Social Services and several First Nations child and family services agencies were also established last year.

These early steps are important given the significant over-representation of Aboriginal children and youth in the child welfare system. However, as child welfare transformation unfolds, we strongly encourage the establishment of more effective, frequent and consistent communication between government and First Nations and Métis leaders.

We would also like to see more urgency and progress made on the community-building component required to address issues affecting children, youth and their families in the province.

In the past year, the Children's Advocate Office has been approached by many community leaders and organizations asking what they can do to improve services and programs for children, youth and their families. There is clear support for change in Saskatchewan, yet there remain government ministries and agencies that could be better engaged at a local level. Successful collaboration will require new government and community structures and mechanisms.

> "A fundamental change must be made to the child welfare system–both in the kind of system it is, and who is responsible for operating it."
>
> Child Welfare Review Panel
> *For the Good of Our Children and Youth*

Prevention

Another key recommendation made by the Child Welfare Review Panel was to keep families together by reducing the threshold for services and providing increased preventive supports.

In 2011, the Ministry of Social Services implemented a widely recognized tool for social workers to more accurately assess risk of child abuse or neglect. Application of the Structured Decision Making modules is expected to more clearly establish two streams in child and family services: maintaining children and youth with their families with supports; and protecting children and youth through court processes when required.

Another positive prevention-related initiative is the contracting with community-based organizations to provide intensive family supports and after-hours services to families in Saskatoon and Regina. Successful pilot projects in these cities have contributed to keeping families together and preventing children from coming into care. This model is being explored in other cities as well, and appears to be a successful partnership between government and the community.

However, some very important issues are not yet a key focus of the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda* including mental health and addictions, and other social determinants of health.

We advise that transformation of child welfare requires complementary cross-government strategies in these and other key areas, thus elevating their profile and importance in government. System transformation in the absence of an integrated anti-poverty strategy that addresses many of the drivers of child welfare is only part of the solution.

Renewal

The language of child welfare "transformation" is important as it signals that fundamental change is expected, rather than tweaking or tinkering of the existing system. Of particular importance is the goal of transferring greater control of child welfare to First Nations and Métis agencies.

For many years, the Children's Advocate Office has urged the Government of Saskatchewan to conduct a review of child welfare and adoption legislation in our province as part of broader system renewal. We are encouraged that this process is to begin in Spring 2012.

It is important that First Nations, Métis and other system and community stakeholders are involved in developing a collaborative process to fully engage and respect them in these discussions. Increased provincial funding for the Saskatchewan First Nations Family and Community Institute in 2011 has allowed for an examination of custom adoption that will be an important contribution to the review.

Social Determinants of Health

The Child Welfare Review Panel found that poverty-related conditions are at the heart of challenges affecting children, youth and their families. Saskatchewan's strong economy provides many opportunities to address these issues, and many sectors in our society can work together to create an anti-poverty strategy that works. The *Social Determinants of Health* can serve as a guide for what areas could be prioritized under the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda.*

1. **Income and income distribution** – adequate income, the most important determinant, affects the quality of most other health determinants.
2. **Education** – works on several levels, including income, to improve or counter impacts of other determinants.
3. **Unemployment and job security** – lack of secure work drives income down and affects hope, confidence and sense of control.
4. **Employment and working conditions** – extended exposure to poor working conditions leads to injury, health conditions or stress related effects.
5. **Early childhood development** – early experience has immediate and long lasting effects – biological, psychological, economic and social.
6. **Food insecurity** – nutritious food is a basic need that contributes to health and maintains personal dignity.
7. **Housing** – safe housing reduces the risk of numerous health conditions and maintains personal dignity.
8. **Social exclusion** – creates isolation and loss of control, creating conditions that compromise other determinants and endanger health.
9. **Social safety net** – if available, a safety net limits health impact of expected and unexpected life events and transitions.
10. **Health services** – lack of access to health care, when needed, affects health outcomes.
11. **Aboriginal status** – First Nations, Métis and Inuit people are more likely to be disadvantaged than the general population, as indicated by overcrowded housing conditions, low income, level of education—and most other social determinant measures.
12. **Gender** – women experience more adverse social determinants than men, most of which are related to income and their disproportionate child care responsibilities.
13. **Race** – people of colour in Canada experience more adverse determinants than other Canadians, most of which are income related.
14. **Disability** – people with disabilities are much less likely to be in the labour force, and more likely to experience social exclusion and income related adverse health effects.

Source: J. Mikkonen and D. Raphael, *Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts*, 2010.

Autism and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Enhanced supports were introduced in 2011 for individuals with ASD/FASD and their families. This included increased funding for rehabilitation therapies and/or front-line services for individuals with Autism, and to assist in the provision of family support and mentorship services, as well as life skills programming for individuals with FASD. This increased government funding is welcomed by the Children's Advocate Office.

Disability is one of the key social determinants of health. People with disabilities are much less likely to be employed and more likely to be socially isolated and under financial stress. If government is to achieve its commitment to make our province the best place for people with disabilities to live in Canada, investments need to be made to lessen the stress on parents, keep families together and prevent children and youth from coming into care due to disabilities.

Issue Example

A child with a cognitive and/or physical disability and their family needs supports and services from multiple government and community-based programs.

The child may require screening, diagnosis and treatment from health services, and education support services to fully participate and learn along with their peers as they grow. Meanwhile, the family might require social services such as income assistance, respite, in-home help or special needs equipment to care for their child at home.

This type of complex case requires multiple government and community-

based programs and services to keep the family together and support the child's healthy development.

Based on the complexity of disability issues and the broad needs of children, youth and their families, we suggest that the ASD/FASD cross-government strategy be expanded to consider services and supports for those affected by all types of disabilities.

Currently, there is a maze of social services, health and education programs and services that can be confusing, stressful and incomplete. We encourage the provincial government to develop an expanded, accessible system of disability services as part of the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda*.

Also, we need to consider that some children and youth have strong natural advocates for their needs. Others, like those in the care of the province or with FASD, may not. Government should provide inclusive and equitable services for children and youth with all types of disabilities. Investments should be based on assessed needs, and government should assist communities to build capacity to deliver programs and services.

"We have made 12 recommendations that, taken together, will serve to guide the way forward. These recommendations are broad, so as to allow government and stakeholders to work together to find ways to make each one a reality."

Child Welfare Review Panel
For the Good of Our Children and Youth

Eliminating the Education and Employment Gaps for First Nations and Métis Peoples

First Nations and Métis children and youth are far less likely to complete their education and find stable employment than other young people in Saskatchewan. Therefore, investments made to address these gaps with education and employment programming for First Nations and Métis young adults are welcomed by the Children's Advocate Office.

The provincial government recently announced a joint task force with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, which will focus on several key goals including:

- improved early childhood outcomes and transition to school;
- increased high school and post-secondary completion rates;
- improved participation in the labour force and employment; and,
- greater quality of life and enhanced self-sufficiency.

We note this task force is expected to begin broad public consultations in early Spring 2012, with the report to be completed early in 2013.

We encourage the task force to consider issues related to education and life skills programming for youth in care or custody of the province and their transition into adulthood. Aboriginal youth are disproportionately represented in these groups and there are significant gaps in programs and services available to them as they age out of the child welfare or young offender systems. Too often these youth are simply transferred to income assistance programs without proper preparation to support or take care of themselves as adults.

Building Partnerships to Reduce Crime

In September 2011, the Government of Saskatchewan released its *Building Partnerships to Reduce Crime* strategy. This initiative included participation by government ministries, and policing and community stakeholders. There is still work to be done in implementing this strategy provincially. From a community perspective, Prince Albert has already started to mobilize to reduce crime through an integrated ministry, agency, policing and community collaboration with impressive results and positive outcomes for children and youth.

Recent amendments to the federal *Youth Criminal Justice Act* will result in more arrests, remands and sentences of youth in provincial young offender facilities. This reliance on incarceration rather than prevention and rehabilitation appears incongruent with the goals of the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda*, and has actually proven to make communities less safe. Yet as detailed later in this report, the Government of Saskatchewan has publicly supported these changes. We encourage the provincial government to consider whether new or amended legislation respects the rights of children and youth, and to assess the potential impacts on young people as part of the work of the Agenda.

What's Next?

The Children's Advocate Office will actively monitor progress made in the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda*. We will also work to bring stakeholders, communities and government together to achieve the goals of the Agenda and create better outcomes for children, youth and their families in our province.

Aboriginal Children and Youth: We Must Do Better

The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA) has named the living and social conditions of Indigenous children and youth as the number one human rights issue in our country. In late 2011, the Council submitted a special report, *Aboriginal Children Canada Must Do Better: Today and Tomorrow*, to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child.

In this report, the Children's Advocate from Saskatchewan joined his counterparts from across the country to highlight the intertwining and critical circumstances facing First Nations, Métis and Inuit children today. As advocates for Aboriginal children and youth, the CCCYA members have identified in their work critical systemic challenges that require urgent attention.

As can be found in the general population, vulnerable Aboriginal children and youth have disabilities; require protection from abuse, trafficking and exploitation; are at higher risk to become involved in the child welfare and justice systems; and are affected by poverty-related conditions such as homelessness, economic exclusion and lack of income security.

The Council noted the importance of children and youth growing up in a family environment and the impacts of abuse, neglect and separation from family when children and youth are brought into government care or custody. This issue was also highlighted in the 2010 Saskatchewan Child Welfare Review, which noted the need for a transformed child welfare system that placed greater emphasis on keeping families together with supports rather than apprehending children and youth once a family falls into crisis.

> "For some jurisdictions like Saskatchewan, Aboriginal over-representation is far more marked than it is in other provinces, and has been a feature of the provincial child welfare system for many years."
>
> Child Welfare Review Panel
> *For the Good of Our Children and Youth*

By highlighting these factors that are relevant to Aboriginal children and youth, the CCCYA noted that these issues are pertinent to all groups of children, including refugees and new immigrants. It is the Council's belief that by promoting the realization of Aboriginal children's human rights, they promote the realization of human rights for all children and youth.

Our country's obligation to recognize the rights of Aboriginal children and youth is reflected in numerous human rights treaties and international initiatives that Canada has ratified or endorsed. The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* has been used to raise awareness about the inequality and violations of Aboriginal children's rights within Canada, but it has not been sufficiently implemented since its ratification in 1990. The goal of addressing the rights of Aboriginal children and their persistent disadvantages remains largely unrealized.

The 40 recommendations in the report set out the Council's priorities for action to address the rights and circumstances of Aboriginal children and youth in Canada. Foremost among these recommendations were that the Government of Canada:

- work with the provinces and territories to develop a rights-based lens for reviewing and amending legislation to embed the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* into domestic law;
- engage children and youth, Aboriginal leaders and provincial/territorial leaders to explore key issues specific to Aboriginal children and youth;
- develop and implement an Aboriginal children's national plan, which is linked to an Aboriginal child poverty reduction strategy and is informed by current and evolving research, properly funded, monitored for implementation and evaluated for outcomes against objectives; and,
- establish a federal Children's Commissioner with a human rights mandate to address significant issues affecting children's lives, including the lives of Aboriginal children.

What's Next?

The Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates will continue to promote the rights of all children and youth, and has recently requested that the Government of Canada adopt the *Optional Protocol* to the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

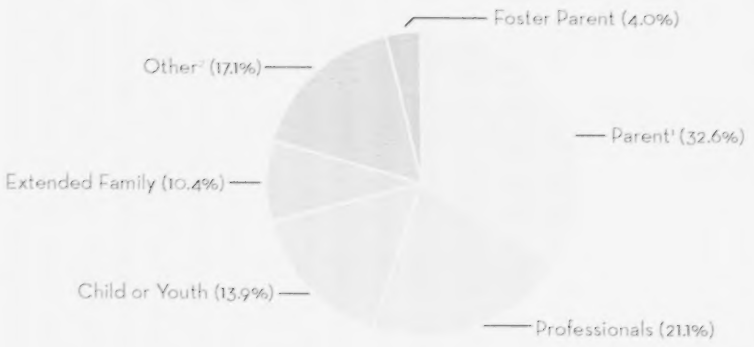
In Saskatchewan, the Children's Advocate will continue to highlight the social, education, economic and health disparities affecting First Nations and Métis children, youth and their families.

Independent Legal Representation

Upon the conclusion of the Oyate Safe House program and services investigation in 2006, the Children's Advocate Office made four systemic recommendations to the Government of Saskatchewan to amend or develop legislation, policy and programming to permit and provide independent legal representation to children and youth in their own child welfare proceedings.

Since 2007, our Office and Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan have provided an interim program of independent legal representation that has reinforced the need for this essential service, but has been limited by the existing legal framework and resources.

Who Contacted the Children's Advocate in 2011



[1] Includes parents, step-parents, non-custodial parents, legal guardians, caregivers and persons of sufficient interest to the child.

[2] Includes interested third parties such as band representatives, babysitters and neighbours. Also includes anonymous or unknown callers.

Case Example

A professional called the Children's Advocate Office to request independent legal representation for six siblings involved in child welfare proceedings. The Ministry of Social Services had applied to the Court for a Person of Sufficient Interest (PSI) order on two of the older siblings and a temporary order on the four younger siblings.

Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan assigned a lawyer to the case, who reviewed the files, met with the siblings to discuss options, and appeared at several procedural and pre-trial discussions.

The lawyer received clear instructions from the two older youth that they did not want to return to the care of their mother and step-father. It was also identified that these youth were doing well in school and had articulated a desire to go on to post-secondary education. Their lawyer advised them that the PSI order would eliminate the opportunity for them to access Section 56 funding for post-secondary education even though they had been temporary wards of the province for many years.

Their lawyer presented this information about the potential loss of entitlements for the older youth to the Ministry of Social Services. The Ministry subsequently changed the plan for the two youth and requested that the court make them permanent wards instead.

The Court granted temporary wardship of the four younger siblings to work towards transitioning them back home. The two older siblings, at their own insistence and with the assistance of their own lawyer, are now permanent wards with the entitlement to post-secondary funding and contact with their younger siblings preserved.

Based on the demonstrated benefits of the Pro Bono Program and buoyed by the inclusion of a recommendation by the Child Welfare Review Panel that children and youth should have accessible legal advice, we renewed our advocacy efforts to move this issue up on the Government of Saskatchewan's agenda.

In response, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General created a committee, which included representation from our Office, Legal Aid, Pro Bono Law Saskatchewan, and the Ministries of Justice and Attorney General and Social Services, to examine the issues and advise on the development of potential legislative, policy and program options.

The Children's Advocate Office facilitated an information sharing session for the committee that included a special presentation on the role of the lawyer when representing

young people by legal consultant Sheryl Pearson. We also discussed the logistics of a funded program considering the operations of the Legal Representation for Children and Youth program in the Alberta Office of the Child and Youth Advocate.

The Minister of Justice and Attorney General has indicated that he is committed to developing a program of independent legal representation for children and youth involved in child welfare proceedings.

What's Next?

The Children's Advocate Office will continue to work with the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General and other stakeholders on this issue. We will also continue to partner on the interim Pro Bono Program until a fully-funded program is operational in Saskatchewan.

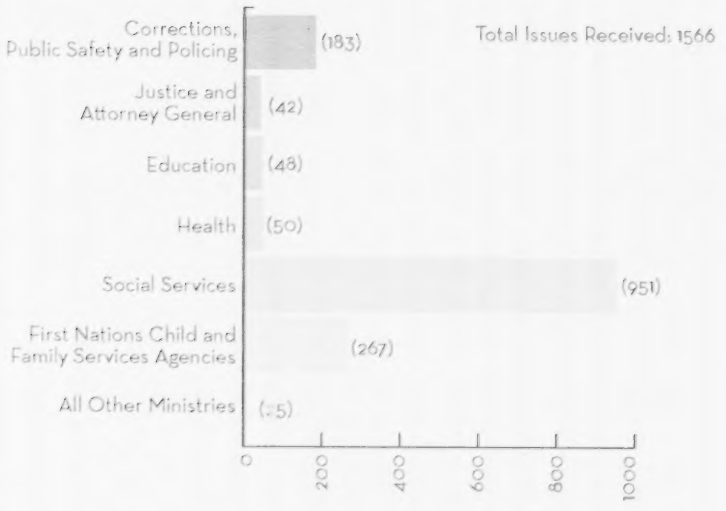
Integrated Case Management and Planning

The majority of the complaints and referrals received by the Children's Advocate Office continue to have case management and planning as the primary issue.

These cases require the intervention of one of our regional Advocates who typically facilitate:

- improved information sharing between the child or youth and caseworkers;
- cultivation of integrated case management, resolution of disputes and creative problem solving by service providers; and,
- recognition of the rights and entitlements of the child or youth found in legislation, policy and practice guidelines.

Number of Issues Received About Services Provided by a Ministry or Agency in 2011



Case Example

A professional contacted the Children's Advocate Office with concerns about a youth who was acting violently towards others, misusing substances, stealing from peers, expressing suicidal thoughts, and self-harming. This was out-of-character for the typically quiet youth. The regional Advocate found that the parents and school officials had differences of opinion with the treatment offered by the health region's mental health services. It was also found that the youth had previously disclosed being abused. The Ministry of Social Services and city police investigated these allegations, which were not substantiated.

The youth was hospitalized for psychiatric assessment and treatment following another violent incident. The Advocate participated in integrated case planning with multiple service providers. The treating physician recommended 24-hour supervised care and mental health counselling. The parents wanted to care for the youth in their home, but were under stress and challenged by the emerging behaviors. As a last resort, they chose to voluntarily sign the youth into the temporary care of the Ministry of Social Services.

The youth was stabilized while living in a group home under the care of the Ministry of Social Services. However, the youth did not receive the recommended counselling from healthcare providers during that time. The youth transitioned home with family supports and mentoring provided by Social Services, and the health region's mental health services provided family counselling. Throughout, the Advocate encouraged collaboration and communication between service providers.

When complaints from caregivers, professionals or a young person reach our Office, these complex individual cases can provide insight into gaps in services and communication between service providers. Our goal is to not only resolve the individual's concerns, but to affect structural change to prevent children and youth from experiencing similar circumstances in the future.

What's Next?

Since we first opened our doors, the Children's Advocate Office has advocated for effective, integrated case management and planning by ministries and agencies for children and youth in care. Important work was done in the late 1990s by government service providers when the *Integrated Case Management Manual* was created. Unfortunately, lack of training and implementation resulted in limited adoption and a short life-span of the Manual in practice. We hope that the work of the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda* will result in more integrated services for children and youth, and fewer individual complaints to our Office.

Foster Care

The Children's Advocate Office continues to monitor and evaluate the quality and quantity of available foster care resources in Saskatchewan. We value the work of foster parents and continue to encourage others to open their homes and hearts to children and youth. This family-based care is essential to our child welfare system.

Since the release of our special report, *A Breach of Trust*, in 2009, we have issued two progress reports on foster home overcrowding with the last tabled in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly in August 2011. In that report, we recognized that much good work has been done since 2009 to reduce the number of children coming into foster care, the number of children living in overcrowded foster homes, and the number of overcrowded foster homes in Saskatchewan.

However, recent year end statistics published by the Ministry of Social Services show minimal improvement was made to further reduce these numbers in 2011, and that the overall number of foster homes continues to decline in Saskatchewan.

We remain deeply concerned about children and youth living in foster homes that may not have the capacity to care for them safely. Increased supports for foster homes, and monitoring and supervision of these cases continues to be required while the child welfare system undergoes the broader transformation to reduce the number of children and youth being brought into care.

Case Example

A professional contacted the Children's Advocate Office regarding a foster home that was under investigation by the Ministry of Social Services due to reports that the children placed in foster care were being neglected and/or abused.

The regional Advocate found that there were four children in the home: two in foster care and two adopted. There were no reported concerns about the adopted children. It was alleged that the children in foster care were failing to thrive and there

Child and Family Services System in Saskatchewan

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Children and Youth in Out-of-Home Care (Provincial System)	4340	4814	4797	4754	4649
Wards	3246	3588	3390	3263	3039
Non-Wards	1094	1226	1407	1491	1610
Children and Youth in Care (First Nations System)	1159	1166	1206	1176	1139
Foster Homes (Provincial System)	779	770	729	691	626
Foster Homes with more than Four Children or Youth Placed	-	136	96	79	77
Children and Youth Living in Foster Home with more than Four Children or Youth Placed	-	925	596	483	457

Source: Ministry of Social Services, Child and Family Services Statistics, December 2011.

were concerns about an injury and the appropriateness of play structures.

The first priority was to confirm that the allegations were under investigation and the children were safe while this was occurring. The professional who called was concerned that there was pressure to return the children in foster care to the home before the conclusion of the investigation. The Advocate received assurances from the Ministry of Social Services that this would not occur and followed up on the case planning for the children.

Upon conclusion of the Ministry of Social Services' protection investigation, the Advocate was informed that the foster home was closed due to its inability to meet the children's developmental needs. Medical examination and treatment confirmed that the two children in foster care were physically and developmentally delayed. Their health improved rapidly and significantly upon removal from the home.

The Ministry of Social Services is providing family services to the former foster home to ensure the safety and well-being of the adopted children.

The Children's Advocate Office has recommended that Ministry of Social Services policy be changed, so that all allegations of abuse or neglect undergo the same rigorous assessment and investigation process regardless of whether the allegations are made about a biological or foster home.

We have advised the provincial government that if children and youth are removed from their family and placed in foster care, there is an expectation that they will receive a higher standard of care and their outcomes will be better than if left in the biological home.

Similarly, we believe that the standards for investigating reports of abuse or neglect in foster homes should be no less than the standards for biological homes, and preferably higher.

What's Next?

In early 2011, a Coroner's Inquest into the tragic death of a young boy in foster care highlighted once again the issues related to foster homes stressed beyond the capacity of the caregivers. We continue to work on our review of this case and have received two other notifications of child deaths in foster care that require independent investigation. As demonstrated in these cases, the safety of children and youth in foster care remains a very significant issue of concern to us.

The Ministry of Social Services has drafted new policy regarding building, health and safety standards for foster homes. We were invited to provide our feedback on that draft policy late last year and expect it will be approved and put into practice in 2012. This is a positive development that we welcome. We will be monitoring the implementation of these new foster home standards as part of our work with children and youth in care.

Advocate's Applause

Ministry of Justice and Attorney General *Children Exposed to Violence Program*

In 2011, the Children's Advocate Office presented to and learned about community-based organizations delivering programs and services to children exposed to violence.

These organizations are operating throughout the province to assist children and youth who have witnessed or experienced interpersonal violence or abuse, with a goal of preventing them from becoming victims or perpetrators of violence and abuse in the future. This is extremely important work that can help empower the young victim to be heard and participate in court processes. It also helps them to begin to heal the hurt suffered, and regain some of the trust lost in their experiences.

Funding and supports for the Children Exposed to Violence Program are coordinated by the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General.

We applaud these fellow advocates for children and youth, and thank them for their great work!

Frequent Transfers and Programming on Remand

The Children's Advocate Office elevated the issues of frequent transfers between young offender facilities and access to medical, mental health and education services for youth on remand following several individual complaints to our Office.

Case Example

A youth called the Children's Advocate Office with concerns about their case plan and the number of transfers they had between young offender facilities while on remand. In the previous six months, the youth was transferred 10 times, with five of those transfers due to a shortage of remand beds.

A regional Advocate met with the youth to learn more about their concerns and determine if we could assist in resolving them. The Advocate found that due to the frequent transfers, the youth was unable to access medical and mental health services and educational programming, and important information about their condition was not being communicated between facilities.

The Advocate contacted the Director of the young offender facility where the youth was then residing, which resulted in immediate medical attention being provided. The other related issues were addressed and resolved to the youth's satisfaction in the following months.

The Children's Advocate Office determined that the number of transfers in this case was higher than most, but not unique. We initiated discussions with the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing to determine the extent of frequent transfers and the services available to youth on remand.

Frequent transfers at this particular facility were due to a high number of youth on remand and too few beds to accommodate them. Youth had to be transported between facilities to place those with an imminent court date in the nearest facility.

Court dates and processes are determined independently of the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, so it can be challenging to manage these transportation issues. Youth on longer remand and with more court dates are at higher risk of being moved more often, which limits the services they can access, and separates them from their family and community support networks.

The Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing was aware of these issues, has done a feasibility study regarding remand issues, and engaged in LEAN exercises to find efficiencies. The introduction of Video Court in 2011 allows youth to be present for court in far distant communities without experiencing the disruption of frequent transfers.

The Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing *Transfer of Residents Between Facilities-Information Policy* allows for significant differences amongst facilities in its application. Because all youth are entitled to fair treatment and equitable services while in government custody, we have urged the Ministry to implement provincial standards and guidelines, rather than leaving it to each facility to develop its own procedures. We have been advised that new provincial policy is in development that will address this concern.

What's Next?

While we await the new provincial policy on facility transfers, we continue to monitor and communicate on the issue of programming for youth on remand. This is particularly important as the impacts of federal amendments to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* are expected to increase the number of youth in these provincial young offender facilities.

Young Offender System in Canada

	NF & LA	PEI	NS
Total actual-in count	16.10	8.70	42.30
Total sentenced custody	12.20	7.70	28.80
Sentenced secure custody	6.40	2.70	4.30
Sentenced open custody	5.80	5.00	24.40
Remand and other temporary detention	3.90	1.00	11.70
Incarceration rates per 10,000 young persons	4.68	7.86	6.43
Total community supervision count	315.70	139.40	
Probation	273.60	130.40	
Community portion of custody sentence	35.20	8.90	
Deferred custody	6.40	0.10	
Intensive support and supervision	0.50	0.00	
Probation counts per 10,000 young persons	79.50	117.37	

Source: Statistics Canada, CANSIM, table 251-0008, 2010 Statistics .

Amendments to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*

As a member of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA), the Children's Advocate made a submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights on Bill C-4, *An Act to Amend the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)*, in Spring 2011. The CCCYA made the following recommendations to the Committee:

- staying any further consideration of the bill;
- providing evidence that shows the proposed amendments will result in a decrease in criminal activity amongst youth, and increased public safety;
- channelling funds to provincial and territorial governments to adequately enact the non-custodial options provided for in the current YCJA;
- facilitating a national multi-jurisdictional strategy that responds to the needs of young people with mental illnesses or severe behavioral and developmental disorders to prevent them from committing crimes; and
- reinforcing that the protection of the public and rehabilitation of youth are two interdependent objectives, both of which are equally relevant as principles guiding the decision-making process under the YCJA.

Many advocacy groups and professional organizations expressed similar concerns regarding the proposed amendments to the federal government prior to the dissolution of Parliament upon the federal election call in March 2011.

On September 20, 2011, federal Justice Minister Rob Nicholson tabled Bill C-10, an omnibus bill titled the *Safe Streets and Communities Act*. The proposed Act included amendments from nine separate bills that had failed to pass in previous sessions of parliament, including those in Bill C-4.

The Saskatchewan Children's Advocate and his counterparts across Canada had to oppose Bill C-10 even though it included positive amendments to some laws, such as tougher penalties for internet child predators, because of the profoundly negative amendments to the YCJA.

The omnibus approach taken in Bill C-10 discouraged public dialogue about the merits and risks of the individual amendments it contained. The Saskatchewan Children's Advocate and his fellow CCCYA members highlighted this weakness and communicated to the federal and their respective provincial governments the case against the proposed amendments to the YCJA.

The proposed change to the purpose of the YCJA was particularly troubling. The shift to equate safer communities to locking up more perpetrators for longer times, rather than investing in effective prevention and rehabilitation of young offenders, is actually counter to evidence in the field.

When consulted by the Government of Canada, professionals working with the existing YCJA criticized the lack of funding and programming available to implement the legislation. Locking up more youth will not make our communities safer. Rather, increasing funding to programs that address

NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	YU	NWT	NU
42.70		619.90	281.80	**182.30**	160.50	125.90	2.80	15.10	7.00
29.30		252.40	78.30	**116.40**	69.80	58.80	1.00	11.30	3.40
17.00		126.40	48.60	**63.00**	50.30	26.30	0.20	4.50	2.20
12.30		126.00	29.80	**53.40**	19.50	32.50	0.80	6.70	1.30
12.80		367.50	190.70	**65.90**	90.60	66.70	1.60	3.70	3.60
8.16		6.28	27.82	**21.69**	5.85	4.03	10.89	38.70	17.41
557.20		6361.20	1790.10	**1329.30**	1770.00	890.50	22.70	83.80	55.80
510.90		6022.60	1676.20	**1252.40**	1622.30	498.60	20.80	78.30	55.40
9.40		137.60	56.50		50.70	23.80	0.70	4.80	0.30
36.80		156.80	57.40	**76.90**	67.30	18.60	0.40	0.80	
0.00		44.20		**0.00**	29.70	349.60	0.80	0.00	
97.55		60.96	165.51	**149.01**	59.19	15.95	82.38	200.49	137.82

poverty-related drivers of crime, such as housing, mental health, substance misuse, and education and employment will make a difference.

In Saskatchewan, the changes to the YCJA will disproportionately impact Aboriginal youth and may create significant costs to expand young offender facilities that already have too few remand beds in some areas. StatsCan data (shown on page 14) indicates that Saskatchewan has the third highest rates of remand, incarceration and probation in Canada. These rates far exceed the majority of other provinces.

With this in mind, the Children's Advocate issued an opinion to Saskatchewan newspapers, talked with Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing officials, and wrote to the Ministry of Justice and Attorney General in late 2011 asking for the Government of Saskatchewan's position on the amendments. In reply, the provincial government indicated that it supported Bill C-10 believing that it strengthens the accountability of offenders for serious crimes, provides support to victims of serious crime and enhances the focus of the criminal law on public protection.

The Government of Saskatchewan acknowledged that there were potential costs associated with the implementation of these amendments. If necessary, it will lobby for federal investments in corrections for the expansion of prisons and young offender facilities.

What's Next?

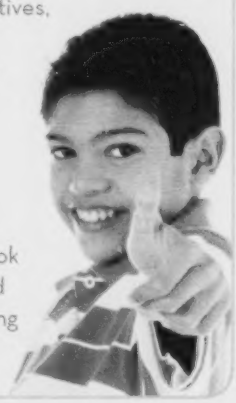
The amendments to the YCJA were adopted in March 2012. The Children's Advocate Office will continue to monitor the impact these changes have on the young offender system, and will continue to raise with the Ministries of Justice and Attorney General, and Corrections, Public Safety and Policing the issues and service gaps reported to our Office.

Particularly, we will be advocating for improved mental health and addictions programming for youth in custody and in their communities upon release. We believe the development of these additional mental health and addictions resources should be embedded in a cross-government strategy on mental health and addictions that is part of an expanded *Saskatchewan Child and Youth Agenda*.

Advocate's Applause

Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing
Young Offender Program Information Sharing

In September 2011, the Children's Advocate Office hosted the Executive Director and managers of the province's Young Offender Program in a day-long information sharing session. The presented overviews of the community and custody programs included new initiatives, research and best practices on northern strategies, assessing serious violent offenders, community crime reduction strategies, and the use of restraints.



Children's Advocate Office staff gained a better understanding of the young offender system and an appreciation for the thoughtful planning and implementation of programs and services. We also took the opportunity to share some of the concerns voiced to our Office by youth on remand, in custody or serving sentences in the community.

Mature Minor's Right to Consent

In early 2011, the Children's Advocate Office partnered with the Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network (SYICCN) and Dr. Maryam Mehtar, Pedriatrician at St. Mary's and W.P. Bate Schools in Saskatoon to brief the Ministries of Health and Social Services on a mature minor's right to consent to their own mental health, surgical and medical treatment.

Case Example

Several years ago, the Children's Advocate Office conducted a critical injury investigation that found, as an auxiliary issue, that the child involved had been denied emergency room services at a hospital during an earlier, but related, event.

The particular health region's policy on consent to treatment had a provision that "for foster children under the care of the Department of Community Resources [now Ministry of Social Services] the physician/dentist should ask for the consent of the Department...."

The policy did not include any explicit reference to the "mature minor" rule that recognizes that a child or youth has the legal right to consent to his or her own treatment when he or she has been assessed by a qualified medical practitioner.

In this case, the child would not disclose the name of their caseworker or caregiver, so by this policy the emergency room could not provide the testing the child requested. Our investigation found that this was a critical point of possible intervention in the child's life. This missed opportunity could have prevented the future critical injury and other negative outcomes for the child.

Following the closure of this investigation, the Children's Advocate Office conducted further legal and policy research, and analyzed our previous Advocacy cases for other examples of the impact this issue had on children and youth in out-of-home care in our province.

We found that Ministry of Social Services and some health region policies and practices did not recognize current provincial law. In Saskatchewan, both the common law and legislation give patients, regardless of age, the right to consent when the treating practitioner deems that they are able to understand and appreciate the nature of their illness, the options available for treatment, and the risks and benefits associated with each treatment option.

There were several examples of health regions that had complete and effective information in policy on how to assess and treat children and youth found to be mature minors. It was clear that these policies considered the Canadian Medical Association's *Code of Ethics* and Canadian Paediatric Society's position statement on *Treatment decisions regarding, infants, children and adolescents* (B 2004-01).

We also found that over the past 10 years, the Children's Advocate Office had received numerous referrals from medical and social work professionals that required intervention by a regional Advocate on behalf of a youth who should have been allowed to consent to their own treatment. In these cases, Ministry of Social Services policy and practice was contrary to the youth's right to be assessed as a mature minor and, at times, prevented access to timely medical care.

We presented these findings and analysis, including related legal decisions from across Canada, to the Ministries of Health and Social Services. Videos of former youth in care presented by SYICCN powerfully illustrated the impact of this issue as youth recounted the affects of being over-medicated throughout their time in care and the lack of opportunity they had to participate in their own treatment plans.

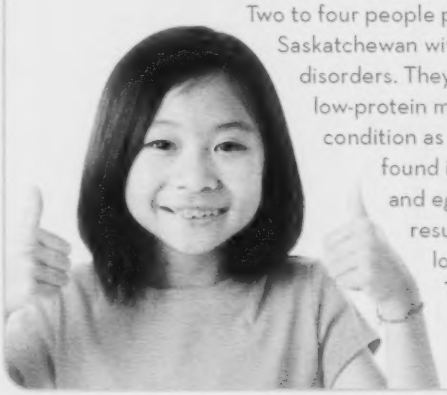
Since our presentation, the Ministries of Health and Social Services have indicated they are in agreement with our assessment of the issue and the need to revise policy and practices to recognize this right of children and youth in our province.

In December 2011, we received a copy of the document, *Informed Consent: Working with Children, Youth & Families* prepared by the Provincial Child & Youth Mental Health & Addictions Committee Working Group. This document provides guidelines for community

Advocate's Applause

Ministry of Health
Expanded Benefits for Children and Youth with Inherited Metabolic Diseases

On October 3, 2011, the Ministry of Health announced that Saskatchewan residents with complex, inherited metabolic diseases would receive coverage for low-protein medical food beginning January 1, 2012. The Children's Advocate had supported the grassroots work of parents to secure this benefit for their children.



Two to four people per year are born in Saskatchewan with these rare metabolic disorders. They require special formula and low-protein medical food to manage their condition as they cannot process protein found in everyday foods such as meat and eggs. Consuming a typical diet can result in developmental delays and long-term intellectual disabilities. The additional coverage will be a substantial financial relief for affected families.

mental health and addiction services in determining if consent is required from a parent or guardian when working with children or youth under the age of 18.

What's Next?

Further work is required to revise regional health policies across the province, as well as Ministry of Social Services provincial policy for children and youth in care, to clearly articulate the mature minor's right to consent to medical treatment.

Infant Safe Sleeping

From 1998 to 2005, the Children's Advocate Office identified Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and unsafe sleeping practices to be common themes emerging from our child death reviews.

In 2006, the province made significant investments to increase public awareness and provide education for healthcare professionals regarding this issue. Also, the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute initiated a successful public health campaign. Unfortunately, infant safe sleeping emerged again in July 2011 as an issue warranting attention.

Case Examples

A review of child death notifications received by the Children's Advocate Office since 2009 revealed seven cases of infant deaths where bed-sharing, the positioning of the baby on his or her stomach or an unstable surface, and/or overheating due to over-wrapping of the child may have been a contributing factor in the death.

These notifications are a small sample of all child deaths in our province, but we believed that they reflect similar issues in the general population. Our assessment found that these tragic cases warranted an immediate public response by our Office. We had already completed enough reviews of child deaths with similar circumstances to know that they are preventable through increased public and professional awareness.

Upon reading media reports of the results of a critical incident review conducted by the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region (RQHR) following the tragic death of an infant on their Mother Baby Unit, the Children's Advocate urged the Ministry of Health to lead a province-wide examination of the issue of infant safe sleeping. We also encouraged the Ministry to lead a broader application of the findings and recommendations of the RQHR critical incident review across all health regions, programming and facilities.

The Ministry of Health acknowledged that the more healthcare professionals who are aware of infant safe sleeping principles and practices, the better informed parents and the public will be to make the important choices that will keep their children safe and healthy. We have been assured that this information will be shared between all health regions.

Also, in a media release issued on July 28, 2011, the Children's Advocate commended RQHR, as well as the family affected by this tragedy, for engaging in such a collaborative and transparent review process. Although the grief of the parents, their family and friends, and the healthcare providers involved was great, we hoped that comfort could be found in the knowledge that the review of this case and subsequent changes may help prevent future deaths.

What's Next?

The Children's Advocate Office continues to encourage the public to visit *www.preventioninstitute.sk.ca* to learn more about infant safe sleeping principles and practices. We also continue to monitor our child death notifications for these types of trends.

Advocate's Applause

Ministry of Social Services
Safe Sleeping Awareness Raising

Complementing the Children's Advocate Office's public education efforts and Ministry of Health's systemic response to raise awareness of safe sleeping practices, the Ministry of Social Services took the position that its staff must review safe sleeping practices with all families they serve. This includes biological parents, foster parents, alternate caregivers and persons of sufficient interest, particularly if they have an infant or toddler in their care.

In early 2012, the Ministry issued important guidelines to all staff and caregivers to help prevent the injury or death of these especially vulnerable children.

Child Deaths and Critical Injuries

The Children's Advocate Office conducts independent investigations into the deaths and critical injuries of children and youth who, either individually or with their families, have received services from provincial government ministries and agencies.

The 73 child death or critical injury files closed by our Office in 2011, which included cases from 2006 to 2011, contain important information about the child welfare and young offender systems, and the children, youth and families that receive those services.

This past year, our Investigators implemented new processes and policies to better assess and investigate child death and critical injury notifications received from the Ministry of Social Services, First Nations child and family services agencies, and the Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing.

Using the new Investigation Case Assessment tool, an Investigator examines the:

- ministry or agency's internal report on the death or critical injury;
- ministry or agency's response to those internal findings and recommendations; and,
- Coroner's information if applicable.

This process allows our Office to:

- fulfill an oversight role and serve as a check and balance to the internal work of ministries and agencies;
- focus our limited resources on completing fewer, more in-depth investigations into cases when warranted; and,
- capture and analyze aggregate data from all child death and critical injury notifications received to identify common factors and themes.

Aggregate Analysis

Our Investigators closed 36 child death files and 37 critical injury files in 2011. Regardless of whether the Investigator recommended closure or further investigation following the initial Investigation Case Assessment, the demographic and causal information from all files is collected into an aggregate data pool. Investigators analyze this information to see if there are any trends that may identify the need for further research, or inform structural, social or public policy advocacy by our Office.

The following case example illustrates that though we closed the file without further investigation, it helped us to identify in the aggregate analysis a key group of young people at higher risk for death or critical injury in our province.

Case Example

An 18-year-old First Nations male was found deceased, hanging in a storage shed near his home in a remote rural community. The Coroner classified the youth's death as suicide. The Ministry of Social Services notified the Children's Advocate Office of the circumstances of his death and commenced an internal review.

Upon receipt of that review, the Children's Advocate Office's Investigator conducted an Investigation Case Assessment, which found that the youth had:

- Threatened suicide on at least three prior occasions and was hospitalized after a suicide attempt a year prior to his death.
- Experienced several traumatic events such as his father's suicide attempt that left him with a permanent physical disability;

Advocate's Applause

First Nations Child and Family Institute, First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies, Ministry of Social Services, and Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing
Consultations on Critical Injury Notification Policy

In 2011, the Children's Advocate Office consulted with stakeholders on its revised *Critical Injury Notification Policy*. Ministry, agency and Institute representatives met on several occasions to review cross-jurisdictional research and discuss options to better define which cases our Office should be notified about.

We thank these professionals for their contributions and participation in this ongoing process.

the death of a younger sibling by violence; the incarceration of an older sibling; and most recently the death of his grandmother.
- Moved back and forth between his mother's home in the city and his grandmother's home in a remote community.

The Ministry of Social Services' internal review found:

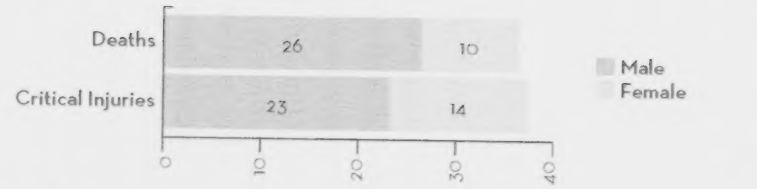
- Documentation regarding the Ministry's historical involvement with the youth and his family from 1992 to 2003, which showed that policies and procedures were not fully complied with at that time.
- The youth had entered into a voluntary agreement to receive services from the Ministry following a failed suicide attempt.
- Integrated case planning was done that included an education plan, connections to community resources and supports, and placements in specialized out-of-home resources to access mental health and addictions treatment.
- This agreement was cancelled when the youth chose to return to the care of his mother; he was then enrolled in the 16 and 17 year old program to assist him in transitioning to independent living.
- On several occasions, the caseworker had expressed concerns about the youth's future should he return to the remote community where support services were not available to meet his needs.

The Investigator found that the Ministry's internal review of this tragic death was comprehensive and set out sound findings and recommendations. The review did not reveal significant issues related to the quality of services provided to the youth in the time prior to his death.

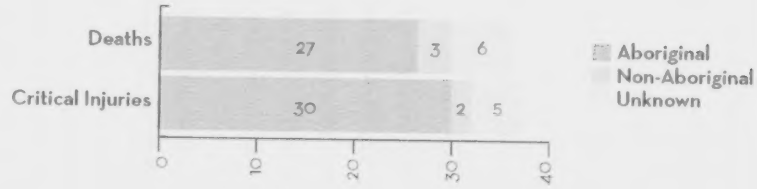
While there were occasions where the Ministry did not fully comply with required policies and procedures, these findings were historical in nature. Unfortunately, the youth had opted to withdraw from receiving services, and once he turned 18, the Ministry had no legal mandate to continue services. This young man chose to return to his home community despite concerns for his safety and lack of supportive environment. As such, the Investigator assessed that the file did not require further investigation by our Office.

Child Death and Critical Injury Files Closed in 2011: Demographics

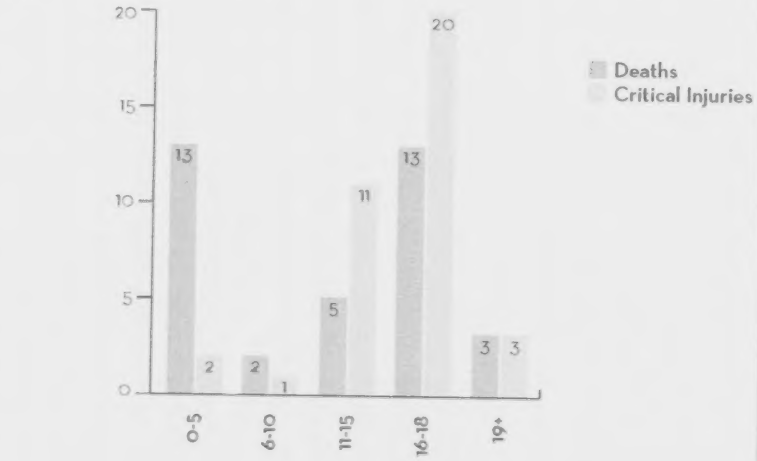
Gender



Ethnicity

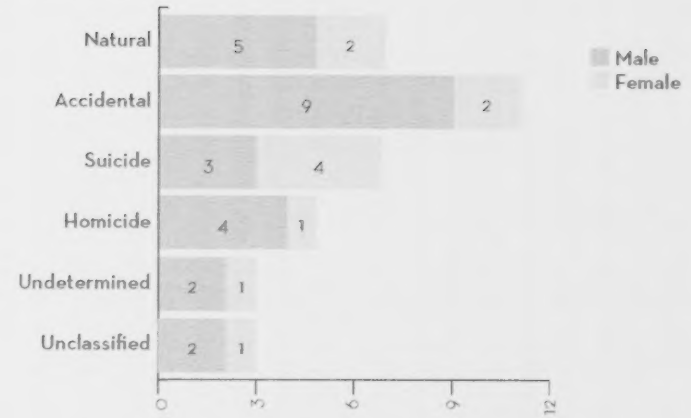


Age

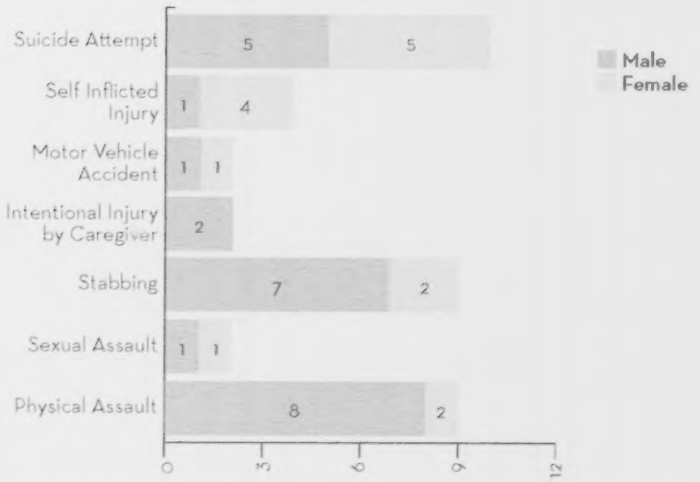


Child Death and Critical Injury Files Closed in 2011: Classification and Causes

Deaths: Coroner's Classification



Critical Injuries: Identified Causes



Youth at Risk

In our aggregate analysis of the 73 cases closed by our Office in 2011, adolescence appears to be a particularly vulnerable period for young people in Saskatchewan.

Youth aged 16-18 years had the highest number of deaths (13) and critical injuries (20) of all age groups. Younger youth aged 11-15 had the second highest number of critical injuries (11), but fewer deaths (5).

Nearly half of the youth in the 16-18 age group committed suicide. Accidents including motor vehicle accidents, drowning, overdoses and hypoxia are the most common cause of death for youth aged 14-18. Critical injuries of youth tended to be violent (e.g., stabbings and assaults) or self-harming (e.g., suicide attempts and self-inflicted injuries). Additional risk factors associated with these deaths and critical injuries included lack of supervision, alcohol consumption, and substance misuse.

Aboriginals and Males

Of particular note is the number of Aboriginal children and youth who have died or been critically injured in these closed cases. Of the 36 child death and 37 critical injury files closed in 2011, we can confirm that 81 and 83 per cent respectively involved an Aboriginal child or youth. These numbers correspond with the over-representation of First Nations and Métis young people in the child welfare and young offender systems in Saskatchewan, and may actually be higher due to the continuing challenge of accurate recording and reporting of data on this group.

The aggregate analysis also showed that, as is true of the general population in Canada, male children and youth are more likely to die or be critically injured than female children and youth in care or custody in Saskatchewan. Of the 36 child death and 37 critical injury files closed in 2011, 72 and 67 per cent respectively involved a male child or youth. Males are more likely to engage in high risk behaviors that contribute to higher rates of death or injury. However, the one exception to this was that both suicides and attempted suicides had near equal representation of male and female youth in our data.

Infants and Toddlers

Children aged 0-5 had the most deaths (at 13 this total matched the number of youth aged 16-18 who had died). However, there were only two critical injuries in this age group, which was relatively low.

Infant and toddler deaths were associated with significant medical conditions such as spina bifida and cerebral palsy, respiratory conditions, SIDS, Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy, infection, drowning and child abuse. This information confirms much of what our Office has reported on in early child death summary reports: that this age group is particularly vulnerable to natural (e.g., born medically fragile), accidental (e.g., co-sleeping) and violent (e.g., caregiver abuse) deaths.

What's Next?

The Children's Advocate Office will continue to analyze demographic, causal and service history information gained through the notification of deaths and critical injuries of children and youth in care or custody. We have a lot to learn from these cases, which will inform further research and advocacy efforts by our Office.

Individual Investigations

A small number of Investigation Case Assessments result in full investigations. This more thorough process is initiated at the discretion of the Children's Advocate, typically when an assessment determines that services received by the child or family may need to be examined more closely.

Investigations carefully examine the system of supports provided to a child, youth or their family up to and including the time of the death or critical injury. All case-related records are reviewed, along with relevant legislation, policies and standards. Interviews are conducted with numerous individuals, which are recorded and transcribed as part of the investigative process.

Members of the child's community may also be consulted. In cases involving Aboriginal children, the Children's Advocate Office is working to ensure community members and leaders are engaged. It is important that the voice of First Nations and Métis people is heard and that their unique history is respected and considered.

Case Example

A 12-year-old First Nations male was sniffing gas with other youth when he became combative and ran into a lake. The Coroner classified the death as accidental due to drowning. The First Nations child and family services agency and Ministry of Social Services notified the Children's Advocate Office of his death and commenced an internal review. Due to the circumstances of the death, a decision was made to commence our own independent investigation.

The internal review and our investigation found that the youth had:

- Long family services history with the First Nations child and family services agency and the Ministry of Social Services.
- Experienced physical and medical neglect that stemmed from his mother's alcohol misuse.
- Been exposed to violence at a young age and disclosed physical abuse by his mother in the months prior to his death.
- Burned a sibling during a previous incident of solvent sniffing. This incident resulted in his mother signing a Residential Services Agreement placing him in out-of-home care.

Our Investigator met with the First Nations child and family services agency staff to offer some observations from the investigation and also hear about the status of resources available in the community for youth that misuse solvents. We shared that:

- The placement of the youth in a group home was appropriate considering that his mother could not manage his behavior.
- The group home had provided the youth with the structure and stability he needed; however, the youth also displayed disruptive and threatening behaviors, including continuing school truancy and solvent misuse.
- Group home staff had attempted, but were unable, to obtain a solvent abuse assessment for the youth; as a result the youth did not receive treatment for his solvent misuse, which was a contributing factor in his death.

The staff members in attendance were provided an opportunity to respond to the findings and ask questions related to the investigation. The staff heard that some positive decision-making had occurred on behalf of the child. The meeting was beneficial as our Investigators learned about the treatment options and community strategies now in place to help youth that misuse solvents.

The Investigation team completed six child death investigation files in 2011, including the case profiled above. Four child death files were closed with findings only, and two were closed with findings and recommendations.

In addition to the previous case example involving the First Nations agency, the three other investigations closed with findings only had common concerns regarding Family Services *Intake and Investigation Policy*. In some cases, reviewing intake reports, conducting child protection investigations, and completing

risk assessments were below the standards in policy. Once the Ministry responded to these findings, the investigations were closed.

The two investigations that were closed with findings and recommendations were conducted by the Children's Advocate Office during the past two years. One investigation involved the death of a seven-month-old girl who the Coroner found to have died by multiple blunt force trauma. Her death was classified as a homicide. The other investigation involved the death of a 16-month-old girl. Her death was classified as undetermined by the Coroner who could not determine whether her death was caused by the abuse she suffered or her medical condition.

Both investigations were comprehensive and consisted of a major file review, interviews, and review of the legislation, protocol agreements and the Ministry of Social Services policies. The findings and recommendations were sent to the Ministry and a health region. A meeting to further discuss the case was held where beneficial information was exchanged. We were pleased when the Ministry of Social Services and health region accepted the majority of our recommendations aimed at improving the standards that safeguard children.

What's Next?

These latter two investigations and two others have been identified as having common factors. In these four cases, the children were born to substance dependent mothers and their deaths and injury occurred in parental care with family services involvement. The Children's Advocate Office plans to release a special report in late 2012 detailing our findings and recommendations in these cases.

How We Handle Complaints

Anyone can call the Children's Advocate Office if they have a concern about a child or group of children receiving services from a provincial government ministry or agency. Children and youth are encouraged to call on their own behalf. However, many parents, foster parents, social workers, health professionals and others call on behalf of children and youth.

We will listen to the concern, ask questions to clarify the information and review the steps already taken to resolve the issue or dispute. We might offer information or referrals to other agencies or ministries.

Advocacy on behalf of a child or youth is usually initiated at the request of the young person. An Advocate will try to negotiate a resolution to the matters raised and may formally review and/or investigate the concern if necessary. If a child or youth is unable to provide direction to the Children's Advocate Office, an Advocate will work to ensure that the child or youth receives all of the services to which they are entitled.

The Children's Advocate Office typically receives concerns regarding Social Services, Health, Education, Justice, Corrections, Public Safety and Policing, as well as First Nations child and family services agencies.

All contacts with the Children's Advocate Office are confidential.

You Have Rights...Be Heard!

If you are a child or youth living in a facility, foster home or group home, you have the right to contact the Children's Advocate. Any such request from a child or youth in care or custody shall be immediately forwarded to the Children's Advocate by the person in charge of the facility or home. If you write a letter to the Children's Advocate, the person in charge of the facility or home must immediately forward the letter, unopened, to our Office.

Building Relationships

Engaging with Children and Youth

The Children's Advocate Office works with hundreds of children and youth every year as we advocate on their behalf with child-serving ministries and agencies. Our primary role is to elevate their voices and represent their interests as we try to resolve their complaints and concerns.

Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network

We work closely with the Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network (SYICCN), a not-for-profit, community-based organization that advocates for and supports youth between the ages of 14 and 24, who are in, or have resided in, the child welfare or young offender systems. SYICCN assists these youth to have a voice in their lives and, like our Office, provides consultation and advice to the Government of Saskatchewan and its child-serving ministries to improve services provided to children and youth in our province.

In 2011, we invited SYICCN to participate in brainstorming and discussions on how our Office can better engage and educate youth about their rights and our services and supports; and on the systemic issue of government supports and services for youth transitioning out of care. The Children's Advocate and regional Advocates also connect with SYICCN and its regional chapters on many occasions throughout the year.

Saskatchewan Student Leadership

In September 2011, the Children's Advocate Office was pleased to be a sponsor of the 32nd annual Saskatchewan Student Leadership Conference in Kindersley. The Conference brings together over 700 student representatives and advisors from across the province's high schools to participate in two days of leadership training, keynote speakers, workshops and student networking.

New Immigrants

In 2012, we will be working to build upon initial efforts this past year to engage with children and youth who have newly immigrated to Canada and settled in Saskatchewan. Our Office has identified that understanding their unique needs and challenges is a priority as the growth in the number of young people in this community has been significant in the past few years.

Connecting Across Saskatchewan

Provincial Government Relations

Every year, the Children's Advocate Office's regional Advocates present to hundreds of children and youth in care or custody, and to their caseworkers and caregivers in foster homes, group homes or young offender facilities. Much of that time is spent speaking about the role of our Office, the services we provide, and the rights and entitlements of children and youth in our province.

On a regular basis, broader issue-based discussions occur at the regional and ministerial levels between our Office and Ministry supervisors, managers and officials. The Children's Advocate will also send to Deputy Ministers and Ministers correspondence and issue briefing notes to formally present his advice and recommendations on matters of importance to children and youth.

In 2011, the Children's Advocate Office developed terms of reference with several child-serving ministries that define information sharing and meeting protocols.

Sturgeon Lake First Nation Health Centre Opening on July 7, 2011
(L to R) Danny Moosehunter, Councilor; Shirley Bighead, Director of Health; Connie Braun, Children's Advocate Office Investigator; Bob Pringle, Children's Advocate; and Chief Wesley Daniels

Aboriginal Relations

First Nations and Métis children, youth and families are greatly over-represented in Saskatchewan's child welfare and young offender systems. Consequently, they are also the majority of the Children's Advocate Office's current clients who require Advocacy and Investigation services. It is our responsibility to reach out and build strong relationships with Aboriginal communities, agencies and organizations that also deliver services and supports to these young people.

In 2011, our regional Advocates renewed efforts to provide presentations about the role of our Office to the 17 First Nations child and family services agencies. In the process, the Advocates learned much about the issues, pressures and priorities of these agencies, which helped inform our service delivery and work on structural, social and public policy issues.

This time spent sharing information and having discussions on issues outside of our individual casework has improved how we work with these agencies when cases do arise. We hope that over time our shared understanding of First Nations and Métis perspectives increases and results in better services for our many shared clients.

The Children's Advocate was also invited to several conferences and gatherings where issues of importance to First Nations and Métis leaders were discussed. Bob Pringle presented at the 2011 First Nations Child Welfare Forum and was a keynote speaker at the Aboriginal Gang Awareness and Prevention National Workshop.

Plans are underway to build on these initial efforts in 2012. This includes finalizing terms of reference for information sharing and meetings with Aboriginal leaders and organizations such as the First Nations Family Institute, Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and Métis Nation-Saskatchewan.

Stakeholder and Community Relations

The Children's Advocate Office continues to work with stakeholders and community partners to improve services and achieve better outcomes for children, youth and families.

The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association (SFFA) represents some of the most important and unsung heroes of the child welfare system–the foster parents who care for so many vulnerable children and youth. In 2011, the Children's Advocate consulted with the SFFA in preparation of the second progress report on foster home overcrowding in Saskatchewan, and valued their unique perspective on the related issues and child welfare transformation.

Newly established relationships with the research and academic communities have also been a priority for the Children's Advocate Office. We have advised, written letters of support for grants, and are working to bridge this community with government policy and decision-makers. In particular, we have begun to work with Indigenous health researchers at the University of Saskatchewan and to promote KidSKAN–a community of service providers, professionals and parents interested in early childhood development in the province.

On a community level, both the Children's Advocate and our regional Advocates continue to meet with leaders and service providers to inform them of our Office's role, and encourage grass roots support for the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda* and excellence in local program delivery for young people.

Connecting Across Canada

Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates

The Children's Advocate Office connects with counterparts in other provincial advocate offices across Canada to discuss and share information and strategies on issues that impact children and youth.

On a more formal basis, we are a partner in the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates (CCCYA). The Council is an alliance of provincially appointed advocates for children from the Yukon territory, the provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Saskatchewan and the Youth Services Section of the Nova Scotia Office of the Ombudsman and the Québec Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse.

The CCCYA's work is based on its commitment to uphold the rights proclaimed in the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Although mandates differ by province or territory, Council members share a common commitment to further the voice, rights and dignity of children and youth.

In 2011, our Office contributed to the Council's special report on Aboriginal children and youth in Canada and its advocacy against federal legislation that would amend the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*. These issues and the CCCYA's efforts are featured on pages 9 and 15 respectively in this report.

Child Welfare League of Canada

In early 2011, the CCCYA engaged the Child Welfare League of Canada to conduct research on available services and supports for youth transitioning out of care across Canada. The Children's Advocate Office provided advice and recommendations on the Saskatchewan portion of this important research project. The final report is expected to be completed in Spring 2012.

2011 Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates: (Seated L to R) Christian Whalen, New Brunswick; Carol Chafe, Newfoundland; Del Graff, Alberta; (Standing L to R) John Greschner, British Columbia; Bob Pringle, Saskatchewan; Andrew Nieman, Yukon; Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, British Columbia; Sylvie Godin, Quebec; Irwin Elman, Ontario; Darlene MacDonald, Manitoba

In October 2011, the Child Welfare League of Canada also hosted an Aboriginal Child Welfare and Alternative Care on the Prairies Panel Discussion, which included Bob Pringle as a panel member.

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society

Following the appointment of Bob Pringle as Children's Advocate in January 2011, our Office adopted the *Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families* as part of our guiding principles.

The Touchstones capture the wisdom of approximately 200 invited leaders who attended a conference in 2005, Reconciliation: Looking Back, Reaching Forward-Indigenous People and Child Welfare. The collective belief was that child welfare can, and must do better for Indigenous children, youth and their families.

Since its publication in 2006, the Touchstones have served as principles to guide reconciliation in Child Welfare and have been promoted by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society across Canada.

In Saskatchewan, the Children's Advocate Office has worked with the Society to secure and distribute education materials on the Touchstones. We also have plans to engage Caring Society trained experts, who work with the Ministry of Social Services, to provide guidance on how to fully integrate the Touchstones into our work.

More recently, we have partnered with the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society to sponsor an Aboriginal youth ambassador from Saskatchewan to present to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, Switzerland.

Presentations and Speaking Engagements

Presentation to Children and Youth in Care or Custody

Ranch Ehrlo Society, Corman Park
Ranch Ehrlo Society, Buckland Centre
Ranch Ehrlo Society, Matheson House, Prince Albert
Onion Lake Child and Youth Care Group Home
Prince Albert Youth Residence, Prince Albert
Four Directions (7)
Youth for Christ Group Home, Regina
Big River Group Home, Agency Chiefs Child and Family Services
Orcadia Youth Residence, CPSP (4)
Cote Group Home, Yorkton Tribal Council
Keeseekoose Group Home, Yorkton Tribal Council (2)
Kilburn Hall, CPSP
Prince Albert Therapeutic Group Home, Prince Albert
Sundance Home, Prince Albert
Pelican Lake Youth Lodge, Agency Chiefs Child and Family Services
Echo Valley Youth Camp, CPSP
SIGN Group Home, Yorkton (4)
Dales House, Regina (2)
Kids in Transition Shelter, Regina
White Buffalo Youth Lodge, Sturgeon Lake Child and Family Services
Regina Native Group Home, Ranch Ehrlo Society, Regina
Paul Dojack Youth Centre, CPSP, Regina
Gammin Abet Children's Group Home, Moose Jaw
Gammin Abet Adolescent Group Home, Moose Jaw
Echo Valley Youth Centre, CPSP

Presentations to Government or Delegated Agencies' Staff and/or Board Members

Ministry of Social Services
Family Centred Services, Prince Albert
Children's Services, Prince Albert (4)
Child and Family Services, Meadow Lake
Child and Family Services, Swift Current
North Leadership Team Meeting, North Battleford

Ministry of Corrections, Public Safety and Policing
Community Based Services, Nipawin
CPSP, Buffalo Narrows
Leading Thunderbird Youth Lodge

First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies

Kanaweyimik Child and Family Services
Onion Lake Child and Youth Care Group Home
Four Directions, Yorkton Tribal Council
Wah Ko To Win - James Smith Child and Family Services
Sturgeon Lake Child and Family Services
Peter Ballantyne Child and Family Services
Montreal Lake Child and Family Services
Leading Thunderbird Youth Lodge, Qu'Appelle Child and Family Services
Peter Ballantyne Child and Family Services
Keeseekoose Group Home, Yorkton Tribal Council
Kilburn Hall, Saskatoon
White Buffalo Youth Lodge, Sturgeon Lake Child and Family Services
Qu'Appelle Child and Family Services
Asihkwanehk Youth Group Home, Agency Chiefs Child and Family Services
Kanaweyihimitowin Child and Family Services
Nechapanuk Centre Child and Family Services

Other Government
Saskatoon Health Region, Ministry of Health
Mental Health and Addiction Services, Saskatoon Health Region, Ministry of Health

Community-Based Organizations
Ranch Ehrlo Society, Buckland Centre
Ranch Ehrlo Society, Matheson House, Prince Albert
SIGN Group Home, Yorkton
Silver Sage Housing Corporation
OASIS Community Centre, Nipawin
Sturgeon Lake Health Centre
Kids in Transition Shelter, YWCA, Regina
Saskatoon Crisis Nursery, Saskatoon
Saskatchewan Foster Families Association
Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers, Yellowhead Branch, Yorkton
Oskayak School, Saskatoon
Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Services
Angel House Group Home, Swift Current

Conferences and Public Presentations

IPAC Saskatchewan and the Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, Regina
Hope Home's Annual Gala, Regina
Legislative Intern Presentation, Regina
Aboriginal Gang Awareness and Prevention National Workshop, Keynote Speaker, Saskatoon
4th Annual Winter Carnival in South Nutana Park, Saskatoon
Aboriginal Family Defense League Meet and Greet, Regina
Regina and District Association for Community Living
SODS Fourth Annual Youth Conference Panel Member
Northeast Regional Intersectoral Committee
Family Service Saskatoon
Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre Indigenous Health Conference, Saskatoon
Faculty of Social Work, University of Regina, Saskatoon
SUYAP Saskatoon UCPX Commencement Ceremony, Saskatoon
Nipawin OASIS Community Centre Annual General Meeting
School of Social Work, University of Regina
Children and Law Seminar, College of Law, University of Saskatchewan
Aboriginal Child Welfare and Alternative Care on the Prairies Panel Discussion, Regina
Foster Families Appreciation Week Banquets, Various Locations
2011 FSIN Child Welfare Forum, Saskatoon
Child and Youth Friendly Saskatoon Afternoon Tea, Saskatoon
Ranch Ehrlo Society Corman Group Home Annual Three Mile Run
North Battleford Youth Centre Graduation and Round Dance
Saskatoon Crisis Intervention Services Annual General Meeting
Station 20 West Media Event, Saskatoon
Child Welfare: The State as a Parent Documentary Screening, Saskatoon
Foster Families Annual Barbeque, Regina
"Read On", Princess Alexandra School, Saskatoon

Organizational Development

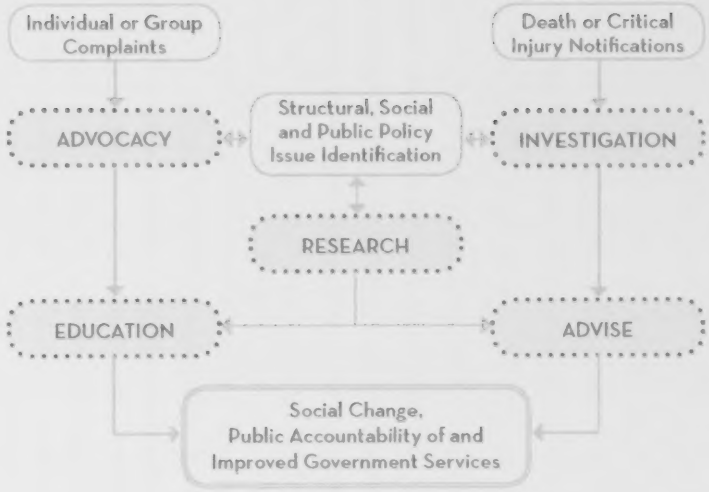
Through our advocacy, investigation, public education, research and advisory functions, the Children's Advocate Office assists the Government of Saskatchewan to deliver good public service.

We identify, resolve, monitor and evaluate the concerns of children, youth and their families through front-line casework with individual and groups of clients. This work is complemented by investigations, research and analysis, and engagement with system and community stakeholders, which help us better understand, elevate and alleviate broader structural, social and public policy issues that may affect all children and youth in our province.

Our objective is to inform and influence all levels of government service delivery and decision making–from front-line service providers to Ministry management to Members of the Legislative Assembly–to achieve better outcomes for Saskatchewan's children and youth.

The staff of the Children's Advocate Office are committed to modelling what we expect of others in government. We too must provide good public service.

Inputs, Functions and Outputs



New Legislation

On December 14, 2011, the Minister of Justice and Attorney General moved second reading of Bill No. 24, *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*, in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly. The Act will replace *The Ombudsman and Children's Advocate Act*, and will set out the powers and responsibilities of the newly named Advocate for Children and Youth. The Children's Advocate worked in collaboration with the Ombudsman to request the evolution and separation of our legislation to provide better public clarity about the services each office provides. The new legislation:

- more clearly defines the Advocate's jurisdiction as including health authorities,

healthcare organizations and affiliates, and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency;
- provides the expanded mandate to conduct research relating to the rights of children and youth;
- permits government ministries and agencies to share information voluntarily with the Advocate to expedite non-adversarial complaint resolution; and,
- ensures that information about and confidential access to the Advocate's services will be provided to children and youth living in care or custody.

Royal assent of the Act is expected in the Spring 2012 legislative session.

Program Review

In 2011, the Children's Advocate Office initiated an independent program review focused on our delivery of Public Education and Advocacy services to individual and groups of children and youth. Information was gathered from:

- selected stakeholders including provincial government, First Nations and Métis service providers;
- a random sampling of case files;
- youth associated with those files;
- the review of related reports and other documents; and,
- our staff.

The review found positive reactions and satisfaction among youth who requested assistance from the Children's Advocate Office. Service providers who interact with our regional Advocates on behalf of these shared clients understood and appreciated the importance of the services our Office provides.

Strategic Planning

In 2011, the Children's Advocate Office initiated a strategic planning process that established four first-year focuses for our operations. Throughout this Annual Report we highlight progress and achievements made in each area.

Organizational Development
Maintaining and clarifying investigation and advocacy programs; enhancing public education, research and advisory functions; supported by sound administration.

Building Relationships
Improving communication, strengthening collaboration and developing partnerships to achieve better outcomes for children and youth.

Addressing Issues and Identifying Opportunities
Pro-actively leading, encouraging and facilitating information sharing and discussions on current and emerging issues and opportunities.

Public Accountability and Reporting
Providing accurate and transparent reporting on our activities, findings and recommendations.

The review identified the need to be more strategic in delivering Public Education to increase its potential impact. It also found that the Investigations function can produce important findings and recommendations, but that recent critical public reports have overshadowed much of the other work of our Office.

The review recommended that there be a better balance between this critical reporting and the building of ongoing relationships with organizations, communities, leaders and staff. External stakeholders particularly emphasized a desire for our Office to develop a partnership philosophy and collaborative approach.

The interviews conducted during the review revealed an expectation by stakeholders that the Children's Advocate Office assume a strong structural advocacy and social and public policy role in the province. We are primed to be a leader and facilitator in addressing these broader issues as our legislative mandate includes this responsibility.

Finding Efficiencies and Improving Effectiveness

This past year, significant restructuring was done to improve Advocacy, Public Education and Investigation services, and address the need for broader structural, social and public policy work by our Office.

A Director of Operations now leads a combined Advocacy and Investigations team. We also shifted one permanent position from investigations to advocacy, so that as of January 2012, our regional Advocates will be able to reach communities we have not had the capacity to serve as well as we would like, including smaller urban centres, rural areas and remote northern communities.

The addition of three Aboriginal employees in 2011 assists us to better reflect the demographics of the client population we serve.

Building on Our Success

The changes completed in 2011 were done within our existing annualized budget. However, we remain a small office relative to our broad mandate and counterparts across Western Canada. We know that there are significant public expectations of the Children's Advocate Office and operational challenges that need to be met including:

- Providing equitable and accessible Advocacy and Public Education services for children and youth clients is a challenge compounded by the geographic area of our province. Children and youth do not typically come to the Children's Advocate Office; we go to them as well as their service providers and caregivers in schools, foster homes, group homes, young offender facilities, family homes, and government offices across Saskatchewan.
- Completing timely death and critical injury investigations is essential to provide meaningful information and education to prevent harm to another child or youth in similar circumstances. The Children's Advocate Office as well as government Ministries and agencies struggle to complete this important work because of its complex, time-consuming and difficult nature.
- Generating accurate and reliable research and analysis on structural, social and public policy

Budget

	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Budgetary Expenditures			
Personal Services	$1,135,000	$1,177,000	$1,209,000
Contractual Services	164,000	180,000	222,000
Advertising, Printing & Publishing	34,000	30,000	30,000
Travel & Business	87,000	87,000	88,000
Supplies & Services	7,000	7,000	7,000
Capital Assets	14,000	15,000	15,000
One-time Funding			60,000
Budgetary Total	**$1,441,000**	**$1,496,000**	**$1,631,000**
Statutory Expenditures			
Personal Services	$180,000	$201,000	$202,000
Statutory Total	**$180,000**	**$201,000**	**$202,000**
Total Expenditures	**$1,621,000**	**$1,697,000**	**$1,833,000**

issues is essential, because we are viewed as a credible, independent resource by many system and community stakeholders.

- Encouraging and connecting diverse child-serving ministries, agencies, organizations and communities in response to the Child Welfare Review recommendations and the opportunities afforded by the *Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda* is a key priority for our Office.

The 2011 independent program review also included several recommendations that were focused on improving internal processes and collaboration. Work has begun to renew and develop Office policies and procedures including improving information management systems for better data reporting. Our managers and staff are receiving training on implementing LEAN processes.

We have also prioritized shared learning opportunities for all staff. Currently, the focus of these workshops is to equip our staff to provide services that reflect the principles of the *Touchstones of Hope* and an understanding of the history and traditions of Aboriginal peoples, communities and families.

Staff (As of December 31, 2011)

The Children's Advocate Office is staffed by a team of advocates, investigators, administrative, research and communications professionals, who work under the leadership of the Children's Advocate on behalf of Saskatchewan children and youth.

Children's Advocate
Bob Pringle

Director of Operations
Ron Pollock (Term)

Advocates
Rhonda Johannson (On Leave)
Laureen Paul
Jacqueline Peters (Term)
Leanne Priel
Shaun Soonias

Early Resolution Advocate
Chandra LePoudre

Investigators
Connie Braun
Hertha Wiedemann

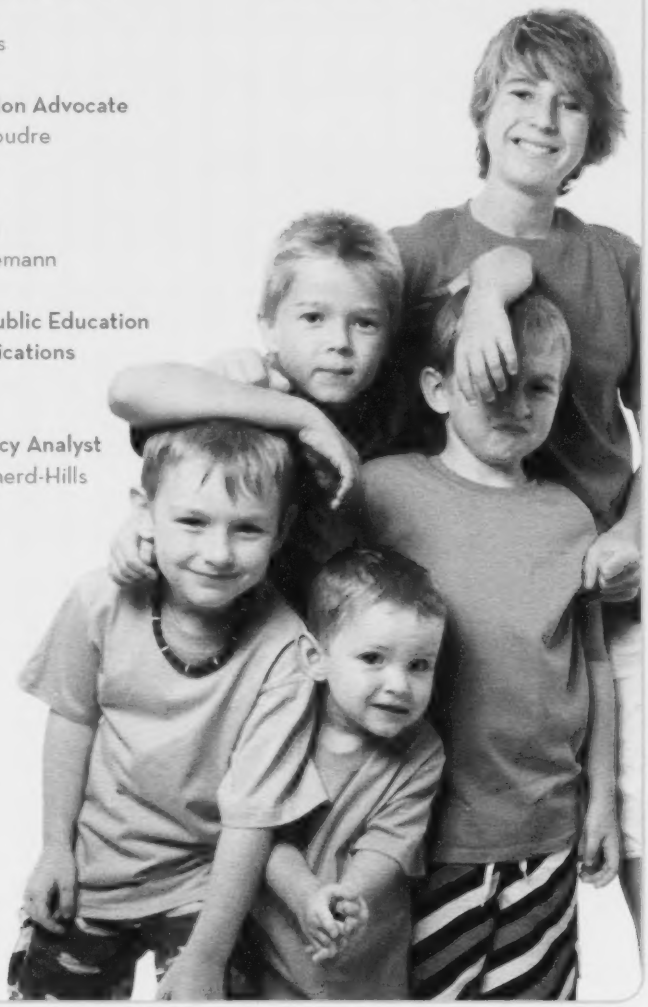
Director of Public Education and Communications
Laura Beard

Research Policy Analyst
Christa Shepherd-Hills (Term)

Director of Administration
Bernie Rodier

Executive Administrative Assistant
Caroline Sookocheff

Administrative Assistants
Sandi Elliott
Penny Fairburn
Jennifer Kovar (Term)



Public Accountability

Tabling of Annual and Special Reports

The Children's Advocate is required to submit to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly an annual report describing the progress and activities of our Office in the previous year. The Children's Advocate may also from time to time in the public interest or in the interest of any person, ministry or agency of government, publish special reports on any matter or particular case that has been investigated.

In May 2011, our Office tabled a combined annual and special report featuring our submission to the 2010 Child Welfare Review Panel. This detailed submission, which included dozens of recommendations to the Government of Saskatchewan, was the final project completed under former Children's Advocate Marvin Bernstein's direction. Bob Pringle, as the former Chair of the Child Welfare Review Panel, had already reviewed the issues identified and recommendations made in Bernstein's report. However, this was the first time the contents had been publicly released in its entirety.

Our Office will continue to advocate for many of these amendments to *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act* when the legislative review process begins in Spring 2012. This will be part of our commitment to monitor the Government of Saskatchewan's response to the Child Welfare Review's broader recommendations.

In August 2011, the Children's Advocate tabled the second progress report on foster home overcrowding in Saskatchewan. The report found that there had been significant reductions in the number of overcrowded foster homes and children living in overcrowded foster homes. However, we also highlighted our concerns about the capacity of the Ministry of Social Services to monitor, supervise and support those foster homes that remained overloaded, and to ensure the safety and well-being of children placed in those homes. Our Office continues to monitor the quantity and quality of foster care and other residential resources for children and youth in care.

Committee Requests and Referrals

A Committee of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly or Lieutenant Governor in Council may refer a complaint or matter to the Children's Advocate Office for mandatory investigation. Committees of the Legislative Assembly may also request that the Children's Advocate make appearances and provide information upon request.

In recent years, the Children's Advocate has appeared, along with other independent officers, before the Human Services Committee to provide an annual update on the progress and activities of our Office.

Media Releases and Opinions

The Children's Advocate periodically releases information and opinions to the media in Saskatchewan. This past year, our Office supported the work of the Canadian Council of Child and Youth Advocates' public education and advocacy efforts against amendments to the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* through local interviews, release of CCCYA media materials, and an opinion that appeared in the Regina Leader-Post and Saskatoon StarPhoenix.

The Children's Advocate also commented publicly on the issues of bullying and infant safe sleeping.

SASKATCHEWAN

children's advocate

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A Voice for Youth